

CONNECTIONS

Online Newsletter
NCDOT Public Transportation Division

Connecting People and Places in North Carolina

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Lavender Named PTD Assistant Director

Denese D. Lavender was recently named the Public Transportation Division's first assistant director for mobility development. In that position, she oversees the work of nine mobility development specialists when staff is all on board.

In announcing the promotion, Public Transportation Director Miriam Perry praised Lavender's analytical skills and program management experience. Lavender joined the PTD staff in 2006 as central region mobility development team leader.

"During her tenure with the division, she has demonstrated the ability to handle complex issues with limited direct assistance from her manager and has made numerous suggestions for streamlining processes," Perry said.

The mobility development specialists work with all public transportation programs within a region. They play a key role in regional planning processes to provide a consistent and cohesive vision in meeting regional transportation needs. Previously, planners worked with urban systems and consultants worked with community systems.

"Regionalization of public transportation is a strategy that several areas of the state have already embraced by providing more transit options and connectivity to places people want and need to go," Lavender said. "I look forward to assisting all regions of the state in accomplishing that goal."

Lavender brings a wealth of experience to her new position. She joined NCDOT in 2002, working first as a community planner in the Office of Human Environment and later as program administrator for the Enhancement Program. Her earlier state government positions included deputy director of the State Health Purchasing Alliance Board, fiscal analyst



Denese Lavender (fourth from left) leads PTD's mobility development team (from left) Jeff Crouchley, Tamra Shaw, Pat Perry, Pam Hawley and Tom Herman. Not present for the photo were Gayle Worley, who retires March 1, and Jack Flaherty.

for the N.C. General Assembly and management engineer/economist in the Office of State Budget and Management.

Lavender has served on the board of N.C. Prevention Partners, a statewide nonprofit organization dedicated to building effective prevention systems in North Carolina communities and health systems in order to improve the health of all North Carolinians. A lifetime member of the organization, she chairs the nominating committee. Her efforts on the Strategic Planning Committee led NCPP to be recognized in 2007 as one of the best-run nonprofits in the state by the N.C. Center for Nonprofits.

A native of Richlands, Lavender has a bachelor's degree in economics with a minor in transportation management from N.C. A&T State University and a master's degree in economics with a minor in statistics from N.C. State University.

Transportation Board Awards More Than \$466,000 To Transit Systems at January, February Meetings

Intercity Bus, Community Transportation Funds Awarded at January Meeting

The N.C. Board of Transportation awarded state funds and authorized federal funds for contracts totaling nearly \$80,000 for public transportation projects for three transit systems at its meeting Jan. 10.

Included were contracts to:

- **Henderson County** (operating as Apple Country Transit) for \$26,484 in federal transit funds and \$26,485 in state funds to continue providing regional transit service from Hendersonville to Fletcher along U.S. 25 with stops at the Greyhound bus station, Mountain Home Industrial Park, Park Ridge Hospital, Asheville Regional Airport and Meadowbrook Plaza. The service consists of 12 round trips on weekdays between the hours of 6:30 a.m. and 6:30 p.m. and also provides connector service to Asheville Transit System's fixed route bus service. Between Nov. 1, 2007, and June 30, 2008, ridership is projected to exceed 13,600 passengers.

The operating funds, awarded under the Intercity Bus Program, will receive a local match, including passenger fares, of \$35,831.

- **Goldsboro-Wayne Transportation Authority** (operating as G.A.T.E.W.A.Y.) for an additional \$15,646 in federal transit funds and \$978 in state funds for administrative expenses, including the salary of a finance officer for the agency and annual software maintenance costs. The administration funds, awarded under the Community Transportation Program, will receive a local match of \$2,933.
- **Iredell County** (operating as Iredell County Area Transit System) for an additional \$9,767 in federal transit funds and \$610 in state funds for vehicle insurance for the 28-vehicle system fleet. The administration funds, awarded under the Community Transportation Program, will receive a local match of \$1,832.

The Intercity Bus Program and the Community Transportation Program are overseen by NCDOT's Public Transportation Division.

Cost Increases Prompt Additional Funding for 53 Systems

More than \$386,000 in state and federal funds was awarded to 53 community transportation systems to cover unanticipated increased costs in the price of new vehicles. The Board of Transportation approved the funds at its Feb. 7 meeting.

The move was made necessary after the state Division of Purchase and Contract approved price increases requested by several vehicle vendors with multi-year contracts, leaving systems underbudgeted. In addition, several systems had unexpected increases in vehicle insurance costs.

Funds were awarded to the following systems:

Division 1 – Dare, Choanoke Public Transportation Authority, Gates, Martin

Division 2 – Beaufort County Developmental Center, Carteret, Craven, Lenoir

Division 3 – Brunswick Transit System, Cape Fear Public Transportation Authority, Duplin, Pender Adult Services

Division 4 – City of Rocky Mount, Wilson

Division 5 – Kerr Area Transportation Authority, Person, Wake

Division 6 – Bladen, Columbus, Cumberland, Harnett, Robeson

Division 7 – Alamance County Transportation Authority, Caswell, Rockingham County Council on Aging

Division 8 – Hoke, Lee, Moore, Randolph County Senior Adults Association, Scotland

Division 9 – Davidson

Division 10 – Anson, Cabarrus, Union

Division 11 – Alleghany, Caldwell County Area Transit System, Yadkin Valley Economic Development District

Division 12 – Alexander, Catawba, Lincoln, Transportation Administration of Cleveland County

Division 13 – Buncombe, Burke County Transit Administration, Madison County Transportation Authority, McDowell County Transportation Planning Board, Mitchell County Transportation Authority, Rutherford

Division 14 – Cherokee, Clay, Graham, Mountain Projects, Polk County Transportation Authority, Swain County Focal Point on Aging

Choanoke Celebrates 30 Years of Service



The Choanoke Public Transportation Authority marked 30 years of service to the citizens of Bertie, Hertford, Halifax and Northampton counties with an open house Nov. 8. Organized on Nov. 7, 1977, CPTA has the distinction of being the state's first rural transportation authority and has transported more than 4 million passengers over three decades. Currently, the authority has 42 employees and a fleet of 60 vehicles, and carries more than 200,000 passengers annually. In March 2007, longtime employee Pam Perry became executive director after the retirement of Wendell Edwards, CPTA's first director.



Pam Perry (below, left), CPTA executive director, and Isadora Johnson, the authority's retired finance officer, reminisce during the 30th anniversary observance.



Public Comment Sought On Draft 2009-2015 STIP

The N.C. Department of Transportation is asking for public comment on the 2009-2015 Draft State Transportation Improvement Program through a series of 15 meetings scheduled across North Carolina. Citizens may also submit feedback via mail or the department's Web site.

The 2009-2015 Draft STIP funds 2,549 transportation projects, including highway, rail, public transportation, aviation, and bicycle and pedestrian improvements. The Board of Transportation is scheduled to approve a final plan this summer.

Comments wanted on DOT's seven-year blueprint for transportation projects.

"This plan is our seven-year blueprint for transportation projects throughout the state," Transportation Secretary Lyndo Tippet said. "We encourage citizens to actively engage in this process and contact NCDOT with their comments."

The Draft STIP is also available online at www.ncdot.org/~tip. Comments can be submitted electronically from this site by clicking on "Public Comment Form." Mail comments to: NCDOT STIP Development Unit, 1534 Mail Service Center, Raleigh, NC 27699-1534.

Melvin Accepts Position With Commission

Joe Melvin, PTD mobility development planner, resigned effective Jan. 1 to accept a position with the Southeastern North Carolina Regional Economic Development Commission.

"Joe's efforts and influence in the public transportation arena have had an extended reach," said Denese Lavender, PTD's assistant director for mobility development.

He was coordinator of the division's employment transportation initiatives and a member of the Joblinks Advisory Committee of the Community Transportation Association of America. In addition, he provided technical assistance to local transit systems and managed PTD's Intercity Bus Program.



Ron Tober in the driver's seat.

History Made With Charlotte's Light Rail

The Lynx Blue Line initiated service to the public Nov. 24, 2007, after a ribbon cutting and ceremonial ride five days earlier with Ron Tober, chief executive officer of the Charlotte Area Transit System, in the driver's seat.

NCDOT and the Board of Transportation were well represented at the event, which also attracted U.S. Sens. Elizabeth Dole and Richard Burr; Deputy Administrator Sherry Little of the Federal Transit Administration; and local and regional leaders.

NCDOT Deputy Secretary Roberto Canales was among the speakers. He applauded the efforts of Tober and others in completing the South Corridor, the first of a series of planned corridors and other improvements. The Metropolitan Transit Commission's 2030 plan, once completed, will consist of 25 miles of commuter rail, 21 miles of light rail, 16 miles of streetcar, 14 miles of bus rapid transit and an expanded network of buses and other transit services.

"It's the debut of one of the most significant transit projects in state municipal history," said Miriam Perry, state public transportation director.

NCDOT contributed \$106.7 million toward the \$462 million project and has already provided \$3.6 million to conduct planning and engineering studies for the Northeast Corridor, which will extend the South Corridor.

Daily ridership has been more than 12,000, exceeding the 9,000 daily riders originally projected. The line is 9.6 miles long and includes 15 stations and seven park-and-ride locations. Trains operate seven days a week from 5 a.m. to 1 a.m., with service available every 7.5 minutes during weekday rush hours.

Western Piedmont Leads the Way

Officials in Alexander, Burke, Caldwell and Catawba counties, along with the municipalities of Hickory, Newton and Conover, recently passed resolutions to create a regional transit authority. Tentatively called “Western Piedmont Regional Transit Authority,” the organization will become the first regional public transportation authority with consolidated urban-rural transit service in the state.

While Tar River Transit, operating in Nash and Edgecombe counties and Rocky Mount, is also consolidated as an urban-rural, multi-county system, it functions under the city of Rocky Mount. The Western Piedmont Regional Transit Authority is the first transportation *authority*, a separate public entity, to hold that distinction.

“This is a huge step forward in addressing current and future public transportation needs in our region,” said John Tippet, planning director for the Western Piedmont Council of Governments, which helped lead the effort. “We are well on our way to having the first truly consolidated urban/rural multi-county transit system operating under a transit authority in North Carolina.”

The transit authority plans to assume the operations of the rural and urban transit systems in the four-county region, collectively known as the “Unifour,” on July 1. The following four service providers will be consolidated:

- **Alexander County** – community transportation provided by Alexander County Transportation, a county-operated system;
- **Burke County** – community transportation provided by Burke County Transit Administration, a nonprofit agency;
- **Caldwell County** – community transportation provided by Caldwell County Area Transit System, a nonprofit agency; and
- **Catawba County** – Piedmont Wagon Transit System, operated by the city of Hickory, which provides community transportation to county residents and fixed-route service for the cities of Hickory, Newton and Conover.

At its September 2007 meeting, the Board of Transportation approved more than \$200,000 for transitional funding for the new authority, including administrative, capital and advanced technology needs. Additional funding of more than \$43,000 came from federal and local sources.



A new four-county regional transportation system is well on its way toward becoming a reality. Among those people making it possible are (from left) Pat Perry of NCDOT/PTD, Camille Sterling of Burke County Transit Administration, Mike Bennett of Piedmont Wagon Transit System, Suzette Bradshaw of Caldwell County Area Transit System, Patti Foster of Alexander County Transportation, John Tippet of Western Piedmont Council of Governments, and Mike Bradshaw of Caldwell County Area Transit System.

The authority’s story began in 2001 when Caldwell County Area Transit System applied for a planning assistance grant on behalf of Unifour. The funding, awarded by the U.S. Department of Agriculture through the Community Transportation Association of America in 2002, allowed for a feasibility study, which was completed by consultants RLS and Associates in 2004.

In 2005, Hickory used federal Section 5307 planning funds, combined with state matching funds from NCDOT/PTD, to finance the implementation study. The city contracted with the KFH Group to complete the study, and work was initiated in May 2006.

The Western Piedmont Council of Governments served as facilitator for the project. A study committee met regularly and guided the progress of the implementation plan. Additionally, each county conducted meetings and public hearings.

“The project had support early on from the transit directors and their transportation advisory boards,” said Pat Perry, PTD mobility development specialist whose assigned area includes Unifour. “They had the willingness to pursue the idea and explore their options with the common goal of providing better transportation within the region.”

The Western Piedmont Regional Transit Authority is well on its way to becoming the state’s next regional system, following the regionalization initiative promoted by PTD. An additional 29 counties and municipalities have expressed interest in exploring the concept.

New Facilities Open for Business

Three public transportation systems celebrated the grand opening of new facilities last fall, thanks in part to NCDOT funding. New buildings will serve the rural transit systems in Madison and Avery counties in western North Carolina and the urban system located in Chapel Hill.

Both Madison County and Avery County have long needed upgraded facilities but especially so after flood waters invaded the headquarters of each following hurricanes in 2004. Nancy Painter of the PTD staff oversees rural facility projects and some urban, regional and intermodal projects. She assisted the two systems every step of the way — from site selection to design and construction — and is proud of the new structures, which enhance NCDOT's transportation efforts.

Madison County - Madison County Transportation Authority has completed a 2,040-square-foot administrative/operations facility on a 2.85-acre rolling terrain site in Marshall. The grand opening was held Sept. 13, 2007.

Architect Wayne Roberts of Asheville designed the building, and Construction Logic of Hendersonville was the contractor. Total project cost of \$456,233 was 98 percent state-funded with the county providing the land.

The new building houses three full-time staff members and 11 drivers, both full and part time.

When the authority applied for funding, it was based in two small rooms in shared space with the Madison County Board of Elections. Following the flooding, staff and vans were temporarily moved to Madison County's administration building.



Madison County Administrative/Operations Facility



Avery County Administrative/Operations Facility

Avery County - Avery County Transportation Authority had been operating out of a mobile trailer since the 2004 flood. Its new 2,000-square-foot administrative/operations facility is located on a three-acre site in Newland. The ceremonial opening was Oct. 12, 2007.

Beeson, Lusk and Street, Architects of Johnson City, Tenn., designed the building that was constructed by WKM Construction of Kingsport, Tenn. Total project cost was \$1.08 million, 90 percent state and 10 percent local.

The building has stone accents and a metal roof that will survive the 100-plus miles-per-hour wind gusts coming off the mountains.

Chapel Hill - Chapel Hill's new Town Operations Center was dedicated Sept. 10, 2007. The facility, the largest capital project in Chapel Hill town government history, houses Chapel Hill Transit and the Public Works Department.



Chapel Hill
Town Operations Center

Planning for the project began after the town was required to leave its former site leased from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Ground was broken in October 2004.

Cost of Chapel Hill Transit's portion of the shared complex was \$19.4 million. NCDOT provided *N.C. Moving Ahead* funds totaling \$7.3 million. The system also received funding assistance through the Federal Transit Administration.

In urban and rural North Carolina, transportation services are available to Tar Heel citizens, and NCDOT's Public Transportation Division is helping make that possible.



Spotlighting Gayle Worley, Peter Albrecht

lopment specialist, and **Peter Albrecht**, manager of the Safety and Training Program, have announced plans to retire, both with 20-plus years of state service.

Gayle began her public transportation career as the transportation program consultant for the Metrolina area. For five years, she was grants manager for the Community Transportation Program and the Rural Operating Assistance Program, as well as transportation program consultant for the Triangle area and subsequently for the state's southeastern region.

Gayle has said that her proudest accomplishment has been "developing, with team members, tools to assist the transit systems in delivering quality transportation options to the citizens of North Carolina."

Gayle's influence has extended statewide. In addition to working with two large areas of the state, she accepted additional assignments outside her assigned area due to retirements and staff turnover, demonstrating that she is a true team player.

After her March 1 retirement, Gayle plans to travel, spend more time with her grandchildren and to do volunteer work, especially in her church.

Albrecht

Peter Albrecht has worked for the division since November 1986, first as a technical assistance consultant and later as a training specialist. He currently supervises safety and training specialists, the training coordinator and the drug and alcohol compliance specialist as they work to enhance the skills of local transportation system employees.

Over the years, Peter has assumed leadership roles in a variety of areas, including emergency management, PTD's Apprentice and Intern Program, the state Rodeo competition, and conference planning and execution.

Peter's down-to-earth approach to transit issues has made him popular with transit folks both in North Carolina and nationally. His rapport comes from "front line" experience when he worked for nine years as general manager or executive director of small urban transit systems in Iowa. His unexpected career in transportation began in 1973 as a music student at the University of Iowa, where he drove for the campus shuttle system.

After his April 1 retirement, Peter hopes to devote more time to teaching and playing percussions, his academic major and his passion.

TDM Highlights

HEAT Web Site Earns Honor
Greensboro Transit Authority and Higher Education Area Transit, known as HEAT, have received top national honors for their Web site, **www.rideheat.com**. The award was presented by the American Public Transportation Association. HEAT provides transportation service for Greensboro-area colleges and universities.

UNC-Asheville Wins ACT Award

UNC-Asheville's Great Bus About has been recognized by the Association of Commuter Transportation with a first-place award for creative excellence. The Great Bus About is a scavenger-type event to promote bus ridership.

PART Hires TDM Specialists

Chantale Wesley is PART's new TDM manager. Working with her as TDM planner is **Amanda Hayes**, who previously was PART's Connections coordinator. Ms. Wesley joined PART from the banking industry.

BWC Welcomes Inductees

Nine organizations have joined the ranks of **Best Workplaces for Commuters** in the Triangle. That number raises the total to 59 employers covering more than 100,000 employees. New inductees are Blue Cross Blue Shield of North Carolina, Chapel Hill District, Lenovo, McKesson Corporation, Meredith College, Quintiles Transnational, Red Hat, the N.C. Department of the Secretary of State and the town of Cary.

In the western part of the state, UNC-Asheville has earned BWC honors through Asheville's TDM program, Blue Ridge Commuter Connections.

Tamra Shaw, TDM Program Coordinator



Quintiles Transnational is among the new Best Workplaces for Commuters in the Triangle. Attending the ceremony marking the achievement were (from left) David King of the Triangle Transit Authority, Ruby Royster and Jackie Gresty, both of Quintiles, and Roberto Canales of NCDOT.

Photo courtesy of Steven Goldfarb



Charles Patton, transportation director with Columbus County Transportation, passed along this recently discovered photo of a bus from a private system that operated in Whiteville from 1947 to the late 1950s.

Committee Studies Transit

The committee responsible for recommending changes in the state's transportation policies plans to release a preliminary report in May. Currently, the 21st Century Transportation Committee is conducting meetings, many in locations throughout the state.

The 23-member committee was established by the General Assembly to study the transportation infrastructure needs of the state, including an examination of the role of mass transit and methods to encourage fuel and energy conservation.

Included on the committee are Board of Transportation members Nina Szlosberg of Raleigh and Lanny Wilson of Wilmington.

Secretary Welcomes APTA

NCDOT Secretary Lyndo Tippet gave welcoming remarks at the opening session of the American Public Transportation Association's annual meeting in Charlotte on Oct. 8, 2007. APTA is a nonprofit trade association representing the public transit industry since 1882. The annual meeting is the organization's premier gathering, bringing together more than 2,000 transit industry professionals from across North America. Public Transportation Director Miriam Perry also attended the event.

Systems Cited For Compliance

Nine community transportation systems have received certificates recognizing their achievement in meeting the requirements of the NCDOT/PTD Drug and Alcohol Compliance Program. Certificates were awarded in December and January to:

- **Alexander County**, Alexander County Transportation Authority – Patti Foster, director
- **Brunswick Transit System** – Yvonne Hatcher, executive director
- **Burke County Transit Administration** – Camille Sterling, executive director
- **Caldwell County Area Transit System** – Mike Bradshaw, transportation coordinator
- **Columbus County**, Columbus County Transportation – Charles Patton, director
- **Robeson County**, South East Area Transit System – Linda Mack, director
- **Rutherford County**, Rutherford County Transit – Gene Adair, director
- **Scotland County**, Scotland County Area Transit System – Gracie Rettig, transportation coordinator
- **Wake County**, Wake Coordinated Transportation Services – Don Willis, transportation planner

Les Twible, program coordinator, conducted the compliance audits.

A Reminder Concerning Finances

Charlie Wright, PTD's financial manager, reminds grantees to follow guidelines for timely reimbursement.

- As of Oct. 1, 2007, grantees are reimbursed according to **state rates** for travel, meals and lodging. The mileage rate is 50.5 cents per mile. Travel subsistence reimbursement is limited to:

	<u>In-State</u>	<u>Out-of-State</u>
Breakfast	\$ 7.50	\$ 7.50
Lunch	\$ 9.75	\$ 9.75
Dinner	\$16.75	\$19.00
Lodging	\$63.75	\$75.50
(actual, up to)		
Total	\$97.75	\$111.75

- Period of performance** on contracts is important. If a project is expected to go beyond its POP, a request for extension is required before the POP expires. This will ensure proper monitoring and commitment of funds.
- The third installment of the **Rural Operating Assistance Program** funds for 2007-08 was dispersed to county finance officers and transit directors on Jan. 29. Previous ROAP installments were distributed in August and September 2007.
- Getting official documents to the people who need them** saves time and effort. The following documents should go directly to Charlie Wright:
 - Requests for reimbursement;
 - Period of performance extensions;
 - Budget revisions/amendments; and
 - Contracts.

Transit People in the News

Sue Powell, transportation coordinator for Lenoir County, received the East Carolina Council of Governments' 2007 Transportation Leadership Award on Dec. 6, 2007.

Dick Page, transportation coordinator for Carteret County, retired Jan 31. Dick worked for eight years in rural transportation. He is looking forward to volunteer work and driving his new Jaguar.

Peter Serzikas is the new transportation coordinator for Carteret County. Peter replaces Dick Page. Peter is from Philadelphia and has a background in risk management, driver safety and training.

Mariate Echeverry has been appointed as interim transit director for Asheville Transit. She replaces **Bruce Black**, who took another job with the city of Asheville.

Chris Maney, who oversees the Madison County Transportation Authority as the county's community services director, is stepping down from the position in February to take another job with the county.

Get-well wishes to **Dennis Williams**, director of the Alamance County Transit Authority, who had bypass surgery Feb. 4 at Duke Hospital.

Transit System Personnel: Send your news to Mary Jo Cashion at mjcashion@dot.state.nc.us

Thanks to Pam Hawley, Tom Herman, Gayle Worley

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Submit articles and photos to:
Mary Jo Cashion * mjcashion@dot.state.nc.us

North Carolina Department of Transportation * Public Transportation Division

Miriam S. Perry, Director
1505 Mail Service Center, Raleigh, NC 27699-1505
(919) 733-4713